

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES:

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
FOR EMPOWERMENT
AND SUSTAINABILITYRESILIENCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN
THE SAHEL - ENHANCED RESILIENCE

Citizen engagement through village level Local Development Committees is creating a sustainable governance mechanism.

Summary

The sustainability strategy employed by REGIS-ER relies on **citizen participation** to ensure community-led development and **community ownership** of the work beyond the life of the project. This engagement occurs at multiple levels, from the community groups, such as Mother to Mother or village savings and loan groups, up to commune level councils.

REGIS-ER has adopted a two-prong strategy to achieve sustainability:

- a planned exit through a training, certification and graduation approach;
- and continued engagement through local development committees. Two critical platforms for citizen engagement are the Local Development Committee and the Citizen Working Group.

The Local Development Committee (Comité Local de Développement in French, or CLD) consists of **representatives from all socio-economic layers** in the community chosen by the community at large. The CLD members work together to analyze, coordinate and monitor development actions implemented in their community.

The CLD leadership consists of a president, general secretary, treasurer, capacity building officer, and a partnership and communication officer. The CLD is intended to be a non-partisan body.

In general, CLD has strong but often under-utilized

social capital base built on informal networks.

The CLD **helps builds culture and values of a democratic society**, as it gives voice to citizens who would otherwise be excluded. In practical terms, the CLD also provides an opportunity to engage in actions that build resilience, to enquire about matters related to their community's food and nutrition security and governance. It provides space for sharing knowledge about good practices, and crucially the CLD serves as a mechanism for resolving rather than freezing potential conflicts that could otherwise harden along social divisions.

Achieving sustainable resilience

REGIS-ER has supported the re-emergence of the CLDs. Originally a local government structure, they existed for many decades though with low participation or effectiveness. REGIS-ER has given them a purpose and many CLDs have shown great interest in collaborating with the project.

REGIS-ER has also taken them a step further to develop a mechanism to link the community committees with their commune level councils, through representative **Citizen Working Groups** (CWG). REGIS-ER has adopted **a bottom-up approach**, strengthening the CLDs in the communities before supporting Citizen Working Groups to be fully functional at the commune level. The CWG model was first developed in Senegal by the USAID | Yaajeende project implemented by NCBA CLUSA. These serve as a second form of local institution to give voice to citizens, and to **empower communities to drive the development agenda** in their communal districts.

CLDs and CWGs are partners in citizen engagement. The CWGs provide a participatory and inclusive **platform at the commune level that can**

represent the interests of communities to the Commune Councils

(formal entities comprised of elected officials, headed by a mayor). The CWGs aim to inform commune councils of the interests of community-level groups (CLDs) and ensure two-way dialogue.

The chain of engagement starts with community groups, whose members are direct beneficiaries of REGIS-ER activities. These groups are represented in the CLD, and CLDs are represented in Citizen Working Groups that influence commune council deliberations. The project's support is offered to community groups as a menu of resilience activities. In time, the **CLDs and Citizen Working Groups will assume responsibility for the continued management of program interventions.** The project will progressively implement a graduation approach based on periodic assessments of certain criteria to measure the institutional strength and transparent governance, as well as its capacity to promote resilience in the face of food and nutrition insecurity.

HIGHLIGHT: GAMBA CLD BUILDS A HEALTH CENTER



In Gamba, the CLD successfully built a health center. This was possible through cooperation with the Bande communal council, the Magaria department health technical service, and support from the project.

The Gamba village CLD initiated a lobbying effort targeting the office of the prefect of Magaria Department. It convened community members to an assembly to discuss and collect funds for the application. The CLD leveraged funds from three of the community's savings and loan groups, and one community member offered the plot of land for the health center. The community commitment supported the decision to accept the offer.

Afterwards, the CLD collected nearly 1,400,000 CFA francs (\$2,600) from the community to contribute to building and equipping the health center. The money collected within the community helped purchase building materials, a professional mason to finish the building and install a latrine, furniture and equipment, and a start-up stock of drugs.

Official CLD roles for development and community ownership

- Identifying and prioritizing **solutions** to problems, in consultation with the community.
- Promoting **community participation** in development actions at village level, by fostering a positive attitude and mobilizing action.
- **Planning** and implementation of development activities.
- **Coordinating** among actors and monitoring of activities.
- Acting as the **link between the community and higher levels of government** (supported by the Citizen Working Groups).
- With CWGs, **soliciting external assistance** from the government, non-governmental and private organizations, as well as members for their own community.
- Creating a **forum for dialogue** between community leaders, politicians, district authorities and a range of social interest groups to obtain information or material support.

With the facility completed, the mayor's office recruited a health agent for the center. During the official opening, the Magaria Department health district rewarded this initiative by offering a maternal delivery bed and a desk for the health agent. The health center has been functional since February 2018.

"Before, to visit the nearest health center 10 km away, we had to spend 10,000 CFA francs (\$20) – and we lost a lot of time. Now, it takes less than 1,250 CFA francs for a visit, and we have the center just next to us. We feel relieved, especially pregnant women who can get prenatal care and professional support to give birth," said Gamba resident Kanta Ibrahim.

This accomplishment also benefits neighboring villages. Achi Moutari come from Maiboukrou, 5 km away, to have her children vaccinated. "We are impressed by what Gamba achieved. It is a unique example in our area. Before, we had to go long way from home. Thanks to the health center and the efforts of Gamba, we cut the journey in half. Such a major change!"

The Gamba CLD continues to organize development initiatives with the trust of the community - it has now taken over the management of the community's habbanaye activity, including selection of beneficiaries based on objective criteria, as well as supervision of the animal assets transfer. The CLD also created a fund of 150,000 CFA francs (\$300) to contribute to drilling a brand-new borehole in their village.